

Chrism Mass
Tuesday in Holy Week
April 12, 2022
The Rev. Canon Dr. Dena Cleaver-Bartholomew

Beloved in Christ, we gather this day, early in Holy Week, to reflect upon our individual and collective sense of call to follow Jesus, for we are *all* called by God. Many of us come to this day weary, some overwhelmed, exhausted, or empty after two years in a pandemic. Yet our very presence here, together, today – whether in person or on Facebook – is a testimony to the ever present hope that sustains us and draws us on.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us to consider our own call and that, mercifully, the Church is not a meritocracy – that fictional state of fairness based on each of us earning and deserving inclusion. Instead, as Paul bluntly notes: “... **not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.**” It is humbling to be reminded that God chose us, specifically, *and* that we have no reason to boast apart from Christ Jesus, who came to give us life from God.

Paul notes that “**Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom....**” It is human to want something clear, something certain, some incontrovertible proof of God’s Presence, love, and saving power. Instead, God gives us the cross and each other. There is much we must learn to hold lightly or let go if we wish to follow Jesus.

God came in Jesus to break the power that fear and death have over our lives. He literally died so that death itself could be overcome. God offered Godself so that a path to new life could be created for all. Jesus explains it this way: “...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.” The sacrifice Jesus made is a onetime offering, made on behalf of all people. Yet, as Jesus also makes clear, *you and I are called to let go of whatever is keeping us from loving God and following Jesus.* We need to name what makes us tighten our grip on life as we know it, rather than life as we could live it in response to the love of God. A seed holds the potential to blossom, flourish, and bear fruit – but only if it lets go of its current form, unravels completely, send out shoots, and rises into life. We are called to look at our lives and ask the hard questions: What needs to die? What needs to change? What is keeping me from loving God and my neighbor?

Because such transformative work requires much of us, God chose to set the example, living into the aphorism, “**If you want a thing done well, do it yourself.**” God came among us enfleshed as Jesus, the only one who could truly show us how to love God and one another. The Incarnation was a whole new level of love and commitment, one in which God chose to live and die as one of us, creating a way for us to move past fear and doubt into love and trust. Otherwise, every time we wonder if the author of Ecclesiastes is right that “**All is vanity...**”

there is nothing new under the sun,” how could we sustain our belief there is a way forward, that there is more to life than ups and downs with a bleak end? Poet Judy Brown writes:

**There is a trough in waves,
a low spot
where horizon disappears
and only sky
and water
are our company.
And there we lose our way....**

How are we to see past what we experience from day to day and believe that there is a horizon beyond our sight that promises life and love greater than anything we can imagine?

When we read the passage in today's Gospel, Jesus has just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. That is about as sure and certain a sign as one gets in this life that something new is afoot. While some people responded to the raising of Lazarus with awe and wonder, certain that God's long promised Messiah had arrived in Jesus, others responded with trepidation, certain that all they knew was now called into question. The Jewish religious leaders saw the enthusiasm of the people building and said to each other, **"You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"** Then, as if to confirm their fearful reaction, some Greeks came to Philip, one of the two disciples with a Greek name, and said **"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."** The word about Jesus had spread so that non Jewish

people from another country had traveled to Jerusalem and wanted to see Jesus for themselves, implying a desire to confirm what they had heard so that they could believe. How many of us would like the same thing?

But when Philip and Andrew tell Jesus, he responds as if the request of the Greeks who seek him indicates a tipping point saying, “**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**” To us the idea that Jesus would refer to his own torture and death with the word *glorified* is hard to comprehend. But in the Gospel according to John, Jesus’ suffering, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are all inextricably interwoven, so the whole process of Jesus dying and being raised to new life is understood as giving glory to God. Jesus even muses out loud about the temptation to pass on this opportunity, but instead he chooses to do exactly what we have not been able to do—to trust through the deepest trough, death itself. With this ominous prediction we enter Holy Week, when Jesus begins the process of glorification, and we bear witness to it. Holy Week is our opportunity to see that God was willing to suffer as we suffer, to die as we die, and to create a new way beyond the ultimate trough of death, to ongoing life with God. The hard part is, as it always has been, that we still have to trust.

Amen